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OLD TESTAMENT INTERPRETATION I & II

A GUIDE TO EXEGESIS OF THE HEBREW BIBLE

RICHARD D. WEIS

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WARNING: These instructions DO NOT tell you what to put into an exegetical report or paper. The course syllabus will tell you that. These are instructions for doing the work of exegesis itself.

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AN OVERTURE TO BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION

PURPOSE AND CHARACTERISTICS OF EXEGESIS

This guide is grounded in an assumption that its readers are interested in the Hebrew Bible for what light it may shed on the meaning of their own world and experience, specifically who God is for them, what God is up to in this modern world, and what it means to be a human being who lives responsively to God. This guide further is grounded in an assumption that passages of the Hebrew Bible require some analysis, explanation and interpretation in order to be useful for that basic purpose of understanding modern life. When it speaks of "exegesis" it refers to this process of analysis, explanation and interpretation of the Biblical text.

In seeking the meaning of our own world and experience through the Biblical text it is not enough to analyze the Biblical text, we also need to conduct an analysis of the situation(s) in our world for which we seek the meaning. That direct analysis of our own situation will not be covered in this guide. Here we will focus only on the analysis of the Biblical text.

In analyzing, explaining and interpreting Biblical texts we engage in a process of disciplined imagination that constructs or reconstructs a coherent meaning from the text. This is necessary because no text, including Biblical texts, gives the reader all the information necessary to communicate meaning. It assumes that the reader knows certain things and will supply them in order to derive a complete and coherent meaning from reading the text.

So the process of interpreting Biblical texts needs to be not only a process of textual analysis, but also a process of self-analysis. Whenever you are coming to a conclusion about a passage and the way it works or the meaning you find in it, you should ask four questions:

1. What is there in the text that leads me to draw this conclusion?
2. What is there in my assumptions and perspectives -- my point of view -- that leads me to think this is the correct conclusion? (E.g., The idea that God plans and controls everything in minute detail)
3. Are there other assumptions and perspectives -- points of view -- that reasonable people (people in my church or synagogue, or people in class, for example) would make at this point? (E.g., The idea that God leaves human beings a lot of freedom of choice and responsibility)
4. If one approached the same evidence in the text that led me to draw my conclusion from this different point of view, what conclusion would one draw?

Of course, in the end you will often have to decide and draw one conclusion and not another, but if you can learn to ask and answer those four questions, you will have a better chance of finding things beyond the limits of your own point of view. Quite simply, it will make you a better interpreter if you can understand the various possibilities for understanding the text.

When you come to use the methods in this guide, please understand that different individuals may need to use them in different styles. If you are a very analytical and methodical sort of person, you will probably find it most helpful to sit down and use these as a set of procedures that you can follow step-by-step. For you the method will be the means of discovering the text's meaning. If you are a very intuitive person, who likes to feel your way and read the directions only in time of dire need, then you may find it most helpful to gain your own impressions of the passage you are interpreting before you proceed with each step in the method. Then when you do follow the method, you should still follow it carefully because that's the way it works best. For you the method will be the means of testing and correcting your hunches and impressions.

AXES OF RELATION OF TEXT TO HISTORY

You may find it helpful in understanding the approaches to exegesis offered in the following pages if you think about the three axes of relationship between a text and historical events/situations.

1. One axis runs from a text to the events and/or situations described in the text.
2. A second axis runs from a text to the historical situation and events at the time of its composition and first reception by an audience of listeners and/or readers.
3. A third axis runs from a text to the historical situation and events in the time of later audiences (e.g., the situations and events of our time).

Much modern European and North American discussion of the Hebrew Bible takes account only of the first axis. Unfortunately, when we are concerned about the help a Biblical passage can give us in uncovering the meaning of life, that is the least important of the three. The axes of relation to the situations of ancient audiences, and to the situations of later (including modern) audiences are much more important because it is across those axes that the text reaches to help readers find the meaning of their situation.

In addition, the kind of relations that unfold between a text and historical events around these three axes are various. For example, a text may relate to the events and situations of which it speaks (first axis) as the object of historical reportage, as the source material for stories designed to communicate the meaning of other, different events and situations, as the context within which a ritual unfolds, or as something to be interpreted and explained. The first of these options is commonly assumed for Biblical texts. The other three can be demonstrated for various Biblical texts. In any case, this is not a complete list by any means. We could describe still other possible relations between texts and events if we focused on the other two axes of relationship.

These distinctions are relevant to the following approaches to exegeting Biblical texts in this way. Because the focus is on exegesis that will serve a larger purpose of reflecting on the meaning and significance of our experience, the exegetical methods described here focus on the second and third axes of relation between text and event.

In the case of narrative passages all three axes are present as distinct possibilities of analysis, but as I mentioned earlier, the axis of relation between the text and the events it describes, while of particular

interest to historians, is not a very fruitful focus for exegesis that is concerned with meaning. As a result, I have chosen to describe for you a method of exegesis that is built around the other two axes.

In the case of passages from the prophets and psalms the first axis, the relation to events described, and the second axis, the relation to the events at the time of composition, actually amount to the same thing since prophetic speeches and psalms focus on their immediate context. Thus the method of exegesis for these passages necessarily is built around the second axis of relationship between text and event, the relation between text and the events and situations experienced by the text's first audience. In the case of prophetic speeches, however, we also explore the meaning of texts in relation to the third axis, relation to the situation of later audiences, specifically in those instances where the book of a prophet's speeches was assembled some period of time after the prophet delivered the speeches.

STEPS IN ANALYZING BIBLICAL STORIES

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this document is to give you a set of steps to follow in the analysis and interpretation of Biblical, especially Hebrew Bible stories. These steps are different from those that you need to follow in analyzing psalms or prophetic speeches because stories are a different type of literature.

One crucial characteristic of the narrative passages of the Hebrew Bible is that they do not say in so many words everything that is essential to the story. They leave the reader to "fill in some gaps" in order to imagine the full story that they mean to tell. For example, when God in Genesis 22 commands Abraham to sacrifice Isaac, we are told nothing of Abraham's thoughts on the matter, only his actions. Surely, however, his thoughts and feelings are an important part of the full story. The narrative leaves the reader to supply these out of his or her own imagination. As a result of this, the questions in the steps that follow will often ask you to distinguish between what is actually said by the words of the passage, and what you the reader (or what the ancient reader) must fill in so that the story is complete. Both things are important, and it is important to observe which is which.

Perhaps the most important difference between narrative passages in the Hebrew Bible, on the one hand, and psalms and prophetic speeches, on the other, is that with the psalms and speeches we get only one story to follow, and with the narrative passages we get two. Here's what I mean. In telling you how to analyze psalms and prophetic speeches I suggested that these are part of a sort of story, namely the story of the situation in which these are sung or spoken to/with an audience. By contrast each of the narrative passages of the Hebrew Bible has two stories, the story that it tells within itself (e.g., the story of God testing Abraham by commanding the sacrifice of Isaac), and the story of the situation within which the story is read (e.g., the time of King Solomon when the story in Genesis 22 was written down and first read).

These two stories that we get with each narrative passage of the Hebrew Bible offer us two possibilities for how we find meaning in the passage. On the one hand, we may reconstruct the way an ancient reader enmeshed in the situation in which the story is told would have understood the story. On the other hand, we can interact with the story on our own as modern readers, and apprehend a meaning directly for ourselves.

In the steps that follow you will find some that give you two options for how to proceed, displayed in double columns. In one column is the way to do the step if you are trying to reconstruct the meaning for an ancient reader. This is labeled, "RECONSTRUCTION." In the other column is the way you proceed if you are wanting to interact directly as a modern reader. This is labeled, "CONSTRUCTION."

WHAT YOU SHOULD DO

ANALYSIS

The purpose of the first nine steps is to examine the story in as thorough a way as you can. Some steps will seem to generate information that is obvious. Do them anyway. There may be more information that you are overlooking that careful analysis will turn up. Besides, the point is to develop as full a picture of the materials out of which the story is told, even if some of that is obvious.

1. First of all, read the passage through several times. Read it aloud. Read it as though it were a play, and you were acting the different parts. Maybe get up and act out the parts.
2. Make a list of all the characters in the story. Identify who is "on-stage" (i.e., if you were casting this as a play, you would need someone to act the part on the stage) and who is "off-stage" (i.e., if you were casting this as a play, you would not need someone to act the part on the stage, but you might need someone to speak their lines out of sight, "off-stage"). Identify who has a major role in the story, and who has a minor role. *(This you can find within the passage itself.)*
3. What relationships do the characters have with each other? Who has power in those relationships, and in relation to whom? Who has status, and in relation to whom? Who has wealth? Have any of these characters been with any of the other characters in a story before this one? If so, what is the history of their relationship? *(This you can find within the passage itself, and or in the passages preceding it.)*
4. Do any of these characters occupy particular social roles (e.g., husband, wife, priest, king, wise woman, host, guest)? If so, what are the expectations about how people in that role should behave, and relate to others? In the culture from which the story comes what kind of power did people in this role have in relation to others, what kind of status did they have in relation to others? Are there any particular ways of looking at the world that go with the role? *(You will be able to identify the social role a character occupies from the passage itself, but all the information about that role will have to come from outside resources such as text books, lecture notes, resources listed in the course bibliography.)*

5. RECONSTRUCTION:

What are we told directly about each character? What are we shown each character doing or saying? What are we shown being done to each character? What does this imply about the character? Why do you think it implies that and not something else? In so far as you understand the culture, theology and conditions of the time in which the story was written, do you think ancient readers would have found the same implication as you did? If not, what would have been implied about the character for them? Why? What are we neither told nor shown about each character, but you think is hinted at about them? What gives you the hint? Why do you think the hint means

CONSTRUCTION:

What are we told directly about each character? What are we shown each character doing or saying? What are we shown being done to each character? What does this imply about the character? Why do you think it implies that and not something else? What are we neither told nor shown about each character, but you think is hinted at about them? What gives you the hint? Why do you think the hint means what you think it means? *(This you can find in the passage, and within your own mind.)*

what you think it means? In so far as you understand the culture, theology and conditions of the time in which the story was written, do you think an ancient reader would have found the same thing hinted about the character as you did? If not, what would have been hinted about the character for them? Why? *(This you can find in the passage, and within your own mind informed by knowledge of the context in which the story was first read.)*

6. What, if anything, does each character say? To whom do they say it? Do they speak for themselves, or does someone speak for them? Are they spoken to directly, or through someone else? Do they begin conversation, or only speak when spoken to? *(This you can find within the passage itself.)*

7. RECONSTRUCTION:

What seems to motivate each character, and what seems to be their state of mind? What in the text leads you to think this? What assumptions about human life lead you to think that the clues you see in the text mean that the character is seeing things that way, and is acting out of that motivation? In so far as you understand the culture, theology and conditions of the time in which the story was written, do you think ancient readers would have assumed the same motivation and state of mind for the character as you did? If not, what motivation and state of mind would have been implied about the character for them? Why? *(This you can find in the passage, and within your own mind informed by knowledge of the context in which the story was first read.)*

CONSTRUCTION:

What seems to motivate each character, and what seems to be their state of mind? What in the text leads you to think this? What assumptions about human life lead you to think that the clues you see in the text mean that the character is seeing things that way, and is acting out of that motivation? *(This you can find in the passage, and within your own mind.)*

8. Review the steps in the story line. It may be helpful to watch for changes of place (marking "acts"), and changes in the cast of characters (marking "scenes"). In any event, spell out the sequence of acts and events. What happens first, what comes next, etc.? Where does the story line speed up and just summarize? Where does it slow down and give more detail? Where are there breaks or pauses in the sequence? *(This you can find within the passage itself.)*
9. Keep track of how the story's point of view, or focus, shifts. In other words, if this were a movie, what would we be seeing on the screen? Who is the camera following? Do we get to see inside anyone's mind? Is that true of everyone or just one character? If it's just one character, does the story seem to be told from their point of view? Where do the storyteller's words echo something a character said? What do you make of that? Is the storyteller taking the character's point of view, or is something else being signaled? *(This you can find within the passage itself.)*

SYNTHESIS

Now you come the stage in the process where you organize all you have been finding in the previous nine steps into a coherent picture. The following three steps are NOT new stages of analysis, but should draw on all the information that you have developed in the preceding nine steps.

10. RECONSTRUCTION:

Now that you've pulled the story apart, it is time to put it back together again. However, because you are trying to reconstruct the story's message for the community of faith that read it for the first time, you need first of all to imagine yourself into their situation. Based on what you find in readings and lecture notes, what theological perspectives might they have held, what concerns would they have had about their lives and their situation, what theological questions or problems would have been on their minds? After filling in that picture continue with the process, trying to read the story as a reader in that culture and context. Describe in your own words what the story probably was about for its first readers. Tell the story, filling in whatever you think is important for the story to be complete, even if the original storyteller left that out. Then go back and look at the aspects of your retelling of the story that are not explicitly stated in the Biblical text. Ask yourself where the "stuff" came from that you filled in to complete the telling of the story.

11. RECONSTRUCTION:

Still working in the frame of reference of the first readers of this story, ask yourself what this story tells you about who God is, how God acts, and how God deals with people? Test this against the theological points of view that were around in Israel at the time of the story's first telling or writing. Would the story have caused its readers to rethink the way they understood their experience of God?

CONSTRUCTION:

Now that you've pulled the story apart, put it back together again. Describe in your own words what the story is about. Tell the story, filling in whatever you think is important for the story to be complete, even if the original storyteller left that out. Then go back and look at the aspect of your retelling of the story that are not explicitly stated in the Biblical text. Ask yourself where in your experience, your life, and your view of the world the "stuff" came from that you filled in to complete the telling of the story.

CONSTRUCTION:

Ask what this story tells you about who God is, how God acts, and how God deals with people? Test this against your own experience. Does the story cause you to rethink the way you have understood your experience of God? Does your experience cause you to rethink the way you understood the story?

12. RECONSTRUCTION:

Still working in the frame of reference of the first readers of this story, ask yourself what this story tells you about what it means to be a human being? Who would the ancient readers have seen themselves to be in the light of this story? If they were to identify with each character in turn, how would they find themselves to be like and unlike that character? If they were to look at their life through the "lens" of each character, what do they see?

CONSTRUCTION:

Ask what this story tells you about what it means to be a human being? Who are you in the light of this story? If you identify with each character in turn, how are you like and unlike that character? If you look at your life through the "lens" of each character, what do you see? If you look at each character through the "lens" of your life, what do you see?

EXEGESIS OF PROPHETICAL SPEECHES AND PSALMS

INTRODUCTION

THE PROPHETS

This approach to exegeting passages in the prophetic literature first of all takes the prophetic books of the Hebrew Bible seriously when they present themselves as collections of the speeches of the prophets (e.g., Amos 1:1, "The words of Amos;" Jer 1:1, "The words of Jeremiah"). Of course, one can read the prophetic books as books, but since they describe themselves as collections of speeches, we first will treat them that way here. Thus the methods that follow treat each speech as an individual creation. The fact that one speech is next to another in the collection of the book does not necessarily mean that those two speeches were delivered at the same time since the book may be organized on a different principle than chronological sequence. Accordingly, the methods that follow do not pay much attention to the literary context of a speech (what comes before or after it) in the book of the prophet's speeches.

This approach to exegeting passages in the prophetic literature of the Hebrew Bible also is based on a particular assumption about what the prophets of the Hebrew Bible did, namely, that the prophets were basically engaged in the business of interpreting reality. To put it more precisely, they were engaged in the business of reinterpreting reality in contrast to some existing or opposed interpretation.

When we speak of interpreting, or reinterpreting reality, we are referring to a search for the meaning or significance of events. For example, does a certain course of action lead to war or to peace? Does the increase in the fortunes of the wealthiest members of society mean that everyone in society is doing better financially, or are the poor getting poorer? Or in a different vein, when a crisis breaks out, and things are happening fast and furiously, there is a need "to make some sense of what is going on" in order to know how to respond to the crisis. In each case we try to give some interpretation to events in order to understand what is really going on, and how to act in the situation. This is what the prophets of the Bible were doing for their society, only in a way that had access to deeper dimensions of reality than most people could perceive.

The prophet's reinterpretation of reality might occur in a context of crisis when the people of God faced great struggle and great questions about their life together before God. Then the prevailing interpretations of reality were called into question by events and the prophet's interpretation is best seen as one of several interpretations competing to give guidance for right action towards a secure future. Jeremiah is a good example of a prophet in such a situation.

The prophet's reinterpretation might come in a context of stability and security when the community already has an understanding of the reality in which it finds itself. That interpretation of reality may seem adequate to the community, but the prophet comes to offer a more insightful reinterpretation and expose the inadequacies and dangers of the prevailing interpretation. Amos is a good example of this case.

If we wish to put ourselves in a place to hear the message the audience heard from a passage from the prophets, then we need to "unpack" four things: the human reality (social, historical, etc.) being interpreted; the audience's point of view on that reality (their interpretation and its basis); the prophet's point of view on that reality (her or his interpretation and its basis); the strategy the prophet uses in the passage to try to persuade the audience to change its interpretation of reality. I speak of "unpacking" this because the only thing that we have in full is the prophet's speech. We construct the rest from various resources, but especially from a disciplined and detailed analysis of the passage. That's what these techniques are for.

In seeking descriptions of the situational reality and competing interpretations embodied and implied in a prophet's speech, it's helpful to think in terms of a brief story. Like any story, this story has characters (at least the prophet and the audience), a plot (perhaps current events, almost always some future events that are anticipated, a projected plot, if you will), dialogue (between prophet and audience; we have half of it, the prophet's speech), and a scene (the social, political, cultural situation). Not only that, the characters have points of view on the scene, the plot and each other. The aspect of this that you must never forget, and that can make filling in the whole story tricky, is that we encounter all of this through the point of view of only one of the characters, the prophet.

Pursuing exegesis of the prophets in this way has two benefits. When you are wanting to build an historical picture of the thought of a prophet, this gives you the fullest resources. When you are seeking to use the prophet's speech to reinterpret your own 20th century reality, it gives you a rich basis for such reinterpretation.

The specific techniques that you need to analyze all this are likely to be no more than five (they could be fewer if a genre or tradition is not present). These five are: analysis of the logical organization (structure) of the passage; genre analysis; tradition analysis; analysis of audience interaction/participation; filling in the historical situation and filling out the story of which the passage is a part, and then listening to the passage in that context.

The first three of these (the analysis of structure, genre and tradition) are techniques of detailed analysis of the passage itself. Because genres and traditions are things that everyone in the culture would know intuitively, they are already helping you gather information about the audience, as well as the prophet. The fourth technique helps unfold the dialogue part of the larger story by focusing on how the passage interacts with the audience. The last technique in this approach (the section titled, "Reconstructing the Text's Meaning in the Historical or Liturgical/Existential Situation in Which It Originates") is where you put this and various background materials together to fill out the full story of the conditions to which the passage was first preached.

After we have pursued this approach, we will return to the idea that the prophetic books are books, as well as collections of speeches, and look at how to interpret passages in these books in terms of the time when the book was assembled, rather than the time in which the speeches were first preached. The same techniques of analysis and the results they produce will serve us equally well for this approach to finding meaning in prophetic passages. Thus we only need to look at a different approach to synthesizing the results of our analysis in the historical situation when the book to which our passage belongs was assembled (the section titled, "Reconstructing the Meaning of a Prophetic text in the Historical Situation of the Book to Which It Belongs").

THE PSALMS

Psalms likewise offer interpretations of reality (at least in part), and can be thought of as located in a story in a fashion similar to a prophetic speech. Thus the same techniques that you use in exegeting a passage from the prophetic literature can be used to interpret a psalm. There are some shifts in emphasis, however, because the nature and social setting of a psalm is different from a prophet's speech.

Prophets delivered their speeches in and for specific, individual situations. To be sure, later generations found that those speeches had continuing messages that were relevant to other, later situations. Nevertheless, each speech is designed to be addressed to an individual historical moment (e.g., the deliverance of Jerusalem from Sennacherib's siege in 701 B.C.E.), the meaning of which it sought to make clear.

Psalms, on the other hand, although certainly composed in particular times and places, found their place in regular use in the worship life of ancient Israel. They either fit and speak in a certain liturgical situation (a particular type of worship service, e.g., the crowning of a monarch), or they fit and speak in a "life situation" that occurs repeatedly in the existence of Israel (e.g., a situation of grief or despair). The specifics of the time and place of a psalm's composition tend to get submerged beneath this concern with a more generalized or stereotypical situation or condition.

As a result of this different orientation of the psalms to more generalized liturgical or life situations, the way we apply these techniques of analysis will shift somewhat. For the most part the techniques remain the same as for analyzing a prophetic speech. In genre analysis, however, we need to keep a different set of genre definitions in mind. Furthermore, in listening to how the text addresses its situation and audience, we must keep in mind a liturgical or life situation more than a specific historical situation although there are some psalms for which we can identify a fairly precise historical situation (e.g., Psalm 78, composed between the fall of Samaria in 722 B.C.E., and the fall of Jerusalem in 587 B.C.E.). These various difference in application will be identified as we describe the techniques below.

ANALYSIS

ANALYSIS OF THE PASSAGE'S STRUCTURE

WHAT'S GOING ON HERE

The ideas and concepts in a passage from the prophets or the Psalms do not come in a random order. Instead they are presented in a set of structured relationships that organize the individual ideas into a coherent message. In analyzing such a Biblical passage it is not enough, therefore, to list the ideas contained in it. We must examine the logical relationships established among those ideas by the passage itself. We may have our own notions about how the ideas fit together, but if we want to hear the Biblical text we need to look in a disciplined way for the clues the passage gives as to how it wants to fit the ideas together. This is what we do in analysis of the passage's structure.

Clues to the passage's logical organization may be found in changes in verb tense (past, present, future), changes in speaker, changes in addressee, changes in topic, changes from quoted direct speech to indirect speech. Other clues may be found in the conjunctions that link clauses and sentences (and that many people read right over), such as: when, but, and, or, because, since, for, therefore, if, then, yet, although. Conjunctions such as these explicitly establish grammatical and logical relationships that structure the ideas of a passage. Watch for them! Still other clues come in the kind of sentence and verse (or part of a verse) is. Is it a question, a command, a promise, a statement, a prediction, an answer, a condition (if . . . , then . . .), a threat, etc.? Look for grammatical relations (e.g., between a main clause and subordinate clause, between a pronoun and its antecedent). Look also for logical relationships such as (but not limited to) cause and effect, action and reaction, act and result, etc.

A PROCEDURE FOR ANALYZING A PASSAGE'S STRUCTURE

There are probably a number of practical ways to analyze these characteristics of a passage and then synthesize the data into a picture of the logical organization of the thoughts of the passage. Ultimately, whatever way works best for you is the one to use. Nevertheless, some students have found a useful technique that I can share with you.

Begin with a clean sheet of lined paper with a ruled left margin (like many notepads). Then go through the passage verse by verse and write down the answers to the following questions:

- Who is the speaker?

- Who is addressed?
- What tense are the verbs (past/present/future)?
- What kind of sentence is this (command, promise, statement, question, etc.)?
- What is the topic?
- Is this a direct quotation or an indirect quotation?
- Are there any key word connections with the preceding verse or verses? If so, what?
- Are there any grammatical connections with the preceding verse or verses? If so, what?
- Are there any logical connections with the preceding verse or verses? If so, what?

Answer each of these questions in the same order, verse by verse. Write down the answers on the right-hand side of the vertical margin on the left side of the paper. If there is a significant change (e.g., the speaker changes) in the middle of a verse, treat the two parts as if they were separate verses. If a verse, or part of a verse that you are treating separately, begins with a conjunction, write that down on the left side of the vertical margin.

Once you have done this for the entire passage, you should be in a position to see where there is continuity in the passage, and where there is change. Out of this you can then create a description of the structure in outline form that shows the various degrees of continuity and change. Once you've done that, you should have a picture of how the passage is organized, i.e., how it is structured.

AN EXAMPLE OF THIS PROCEDURE

As a brief example of how to apply this procedure, let's look at Isaiah 42:18-25. First of all, **BEFORE YOU DO ANYTHING ELSE**, read the passage. Now go back through it with the list of questions I just gave you, and see how much of that stuff you notice yourself. Don't bother about keeping notes. Just try to be aware of this stuff. If you haven't done this yet, **DO IT NOW before you read any more!!!**

All right, now that you've read the passage and looked for the kinds of data that I suggested you watch for, here's what I came up with for a verse by verse analysis:

- 18 SPEAKER: prophet; ADDRESSEE: audience (use of "you"); VERB TENSE: present; KIND OF SENTENCE: command/exhortation to pay attention; TOPIC: hearing/deafness, seeing/blindness and the audience; QUOTATION? no; KEY WORD CONNECTIONS: na; GRAMMATICAL CONNECTIONS: na; LOGICAL CONNECTIONS: na.
- 19 SPEAKER: prophet or God; ADDRESSEE: audience; VERB TENSE: present; KIND OF SENTENCE: question; TOPIC: hearing/deafness, seeing/blindness and the audience now described as God's servant; QUOTATION? no; KEY WORD CONNECTIONS: yes (hearing/deafness, seeing/blindness); GRAMMATICAL CONNECTIONS: no; LOGICAL CONNECTIONS: ?.

- 20 SPEAKER: prophet or God; ADDRESSEE: audience; VERB TENSE: present; KIND OF SENTENCE: descriptive statement; TOPIC: hearing/deafness, seeing/blindness of the figure described in v 19; QUOTATION? no; KEY WORD CONNECTIONS: yes (hearing/deafness, seeing/blindness); GRAMMATICAL CONNECTIONS: yes (figure in v 19 is the antecedent of the pronouns "he" and "his"); LOGICAL CONNECTIONS: yes (spells out the nature of the deafness and blindness mentioned in v 19).
- 21 SPEAKER: prophet; ADDRESSEE: audience; VERB TENSE: past; KIND OF SENTENCE: statement of purpose ("God was please *for the sake of* ..., *to* ..."); TOPIC: God's intention; QUOTATION? no; KEY WORD CONNECTIONS: no; GRAMMATICAL CONNECTIONS: no; LOGICAL CONNECTIONS: no.
- But 22 SPEAKER: prophet; ADDRESSEE: audience; VERB TENSE: present; KIND OF SENTENCE: description of conditions; TOPIC: the people's present horrible condition; QUOTATION? no; KEY WORD CONNECTIONS: no; GRAMMATICAL CONNECTIONS: via the conjunction "but" (linking & contrasting with v 21); LOGICAL CONNECTIONS: contrast with v 21.
- 23 SPEAKER: prophet; ADDRESSEE: audience; VERB TENSE: future (but very imminent, virtually present); KIND OF SENTENCE: question; TOPIC: asking who will pay attention; QUOTATION? no; KEY WORD CONNECTIONS: no; GRAMMATICAL CONNECTIONS: no; LOGICAL CONNECTIONS: no.
- 24a ("Who gave Jacob up to the spoiler, and Israel to the robbers?") SPEAKER: prophet; ADDRESSEE: audience; VERB TENSE: past (but the question expects a present answer); KIND OF SENTENCE: question; TOPIC: who is responsible for Israel's present condition; QUOTATION? no; KEY WORD CONNECTIONS: yes, to v 22 ("spoiler" and "robbers"); GRAMMATICAL CONNECTIONS: no; LOGICAL CONNECTIONS: no.
- 24b ("Was it not the LORD ... not obey?") SPEAKER: prophet; ADDRESSEE: audience; VERB TENSE: past; KIND OF SENTENCE: question (specifically a leading question that suggests its answer; main clause = "Was it not the LORD") + descriptive statement (subordinate clause defining the LORD ["against whom ..."]); TOPIC: who is responsible for Israel's present condition (main clause) + the relation between God and Israel/the audience (subordinate clause); QUOTATION? no; KEY WORD CONNECTIONS: no; GRAMMATICAL CONNECTIONS: no; LOGICAL CONNECTIONS: yes, this suggest an answer to the question in 24a.

So 25 SPEAKER: prophet; ADDRESSEE: audience; VERB TENSE: past; KIND OF SENTENCE: descriptive statement; TOPIC: more on the relation between God and Israel/the audience QUOTATION? no; KEY WORD CONNECTIONS: perhaps with vv 18-20 ("he did not understand"); GRAMMATICAL CONNECTIONS: yes, "so" links this to the subordinate clause in v 24b; LOGICAL CONNECTIONS: yes, this continues the story line of the description in v 24b.

Now, how do we get from all these data to an outline that shows the continuities and changes that organize the passage's ideas? One approach might be simply to look down the list for each category (e.g., speaker, addressee) to see where things stay the same and where they change. As you do this, patterns will emerge. If you watch the conjunctions out there in the left margin, you'll also see how some verses are linked together. Here, for example, "but" links vv 21 and 22, so you know they will go together somewhere in the outline. "So" links vv 24b and 25, so you know they will go together somehow.

If we check for continuity and change category by category, we notice several things. First of all, the speaker and addressee seem to stay the same all the way through, so they will not help us find points of change in the organization. If we watch the very next category, however, we see continuity and change pop right up. Vv 18-20 are all present tense. Vv 21 and 22 are past tense. V 23 is future tense although it's really asking about the imminent present, and vv 24 and 25 are basically past tense although they ask a question which needs to be answered in the present.

When we look at these groupings more closely we see that vv 18-20 also share common topics and are tied together by key word, grammatical and logical connections. Thus we can say these are a subsection of the whole passage 42:18-25. Vv 21-22 are about different topics, but they are tied together by the conjunction "but" and the logical and grammatical relationships it signals. Thus we can say these verse are a subsection of the whole passage. It also looks like vv 23-25 might go together although that will take more exploration. So we can start to outline the passage like this:

- I. 42:18-20
- II. 42:21-22
- III. 42:23-25

The next thing we need to do is figure out how to identify each of these sections. The best way to describe them is to ask what they are, or what they do. If we ask that, you can see that 42:18-20 basically do two things. They call for the audience to pay attention (the command or exhortation in v 18), and they characterize the audience (by calling them deaf and blind, and then defining the nature of their deafness and blindness, vv 18-20). Thus maybe we should call them a "Call for attention and characterization of the audience." Vv 21-22 are descriptions that are set in contrast to each other. The first is a description of God's purpose, and the second is a description of the people's condition. Perhaps then we should call them a "Description of the contrast between God's intention and the people's condition." Then our outline would look like this:

I. Call for attention and characterization of the audience	42:18-20
II. Description of the contrast between God's intention and the people's condition	21-22
A. Description of God's intention	21
B. Description of the people's condition	22
III.	23-25

Now, what shall we do with 42:23-25? Well, the question in v 23 seems to invite someone to pay attention, doesn't it? It's on a different topic and has a different tense than vv 24-25, so perhaps we should consider it a sort of introduction to vv 24-25. If vv 24-25 are the "main event" in vv 24-25, how do we describe them? When we look at how verse 25 seems to tie into the descriptive part of v 24b (through the "so" and the continuity of the story line), it looks as if the part of v 24 that begins "against whom ..." and v 25 are one long subordinate clause describing "the LORD" in the second question of v 24. Thus the main clauses of vv 24-25 are the two questions of v 24. Since the second question ("Was it not the LORD?") suggests the answer to the first ("Who gave Jacob ... to the robbers?"), that first question in v 24 seems to be the most important part of vv 23-25. What is v 24a a question about? The key word connections with v 22 show that it is asking about the condition of the people of Israel in exile (the audience). What it asks, however, is not why is the people in this condition, but who is responsible for this happening. Thus vv 23-25 could fairly be called an "Expanded question about who is responsible for the people's condition." The "expanded" part refers to the introduction and the second question suggesting the answer to the first. We could outline all this in the following way:

III. Expanded question about who is responsible for the people's condition	42:23-25
A. Introduction: invitation to pay attention	23
B. Questions about responsibility for the condition	24-25
1. The main question ("Who gave ... to the robbers?")	24a
2. Question suggesting the answer	24b-25

Our outline of the structure (logical organization of the ideas) of this passage would look like this then:

I. Call for attention and characterization of the audience	42:18-20
II. Description of the contrast between God's intention and the people's condition	21-22
A. Description of God's intention	21
B. Description of the people's condition	22
III. Expanded question about who is responsible for the people's condition	42:23-25
A. Introduction: invitation to pay attention	23
B. Questions about responsibility for the condition	24-25
1. The main question ("Who gave ... to the robbers?")	24a
2. Question suggesting the answer	24b-25

Perhaps you can see what's going on here. The prophet calls for people's attention, and in the process suggests that they do not understand reality correctly (vv 18-20). The prophet then proposes a problem, the contrast between God's desire and the people's condition (vv 21-22). Finally, the prophet asks some questions about that problem as a means of analyzing it and obtaining a correct perception of reality. The nature of the questions the prophet asks suggests that the real issue that he or she and the audience are wrestling with is not "why are we here?" but "who put us here, the LORD or some other god?"

GENRE ANALYSIS

WHAT'S GOING ON HERE

Many interpreters of the Hebrew Bible have observed that individual Biblical passages (especially prophetic speeches, psalms and laws) often share similar structures and styles with other patterns in spite of having quite different content. For example, there are many speeches in the prophetic books that begin by accusing some person or group of various kinds of wrong-doing, and announcing that as a consequence of these misdeeds, God will act in certain specific ways. The things that people are accused of doing or failing to do vary from speech to speech. The things God will do vary from speech to speech. The basic structure of accusation of past or present human misdeeds followed by an announcement of God's future deeds, presented as the consequence of the human deeds, remains the same.

What becomes particularly important about structural kinship among diverse passages is that individual passages, while sharing the same structure, show variations on the basic pattern. These variations -- differences -- from the basic pattern often make key contributions to the meaning of the individual passage. For example, the pattern just described in the previous paragraph, by presenting the people's misdeeds first serves the purpose of revealing to people the real significance of their actions. If the structure is inverted and the announcement of what God will do comes first, then that is emphasized, rather than the people's actions, and the purpose of the speech is more a justification of what God will do.

When we are interpreting Biblical texts *without reference* to the culture and historical situations within which they originate, these cases of structural kinship among passages point us to some illuminating comparisons. We are free to use these or not, as we choose.

When we are interpreting Biblical texts *in terms of* the culture and historical situations within which they originate, scholars recognize that these cases of structural kinship among passages are instances of the occurrence of genres among the Biblical literature. In other words, they are part of the culture of ancient Israel. Specifically, they are part of the rhetoric of ancient Israel. The first audiences of these passages would have known about these ways of organizing speeches and would have expected the speeches to follow recognizable patterns. Thus difference from the pattern would have been particularly significant in communicating meaning. The rest of this discussion focuses on this way of interpreting these patterns of similarity and difference among texts.

Genres are customary forms of expression, i.e., types of speeches or writings that are associated with particular purposes and particular settings in human social life. Prophets use them because these are forms of expression that most folks in Israelite society would know intuitively, just as you know the

forms "comic strip," "sermon," "campaign speech," "love letter," etc. For two reasons it's worth your time and effort to check out what genre a prophet might be using in your passage, and what they're doing with it. Prophets use genres, often borrowed from other spheres of life, to imply certain things with their speech rather than state them directly. For example, a genre called a "woe oracle" (beginning with the Hebrew word *hoi*, meaning "woe") originated in the setting of the funeral, mourning for someone dead. For a prophet to use such a speech for some one who is alive is to imply that they are as good as dead. On other occasions prophets use genres because they count on the audience having certain expectations about how the speech will go once they recognize the genre. The prophet then plays off of those expectations, and does something different to make a point.

Psalmists use genres because the liturgies of worship in ancient Israel, just like liturgies today, were structured according to certain routine patterns. These typical worship structures shape the psalms used in worship, so that they fall into certain characteristic genres. While individual psalms may follow their genres more closely than a prophetic speech might, even here there is room for individual expression so that you need to keep your eyes open for how a psalm will deviate from the expected pattern of a genre.

No ancient definitions of the genres the prophets and psalmists used have survived until today. There were definitions to be sure, but no one wrote them down because everybody who belonged to that culture knew these things intuitively. Modern scholars deliberately reconstruct the genre definitions by comparing Biblical passages that belong to the same genre, and identifying the characteristics that are typical of those passages, and distinguish them from other passages. We then are able to apply these definitions in our analysis of prophetic and psalmic passages. In fact, if we must do this quite deliberately and consciously if we want to take advantage of this knowledge because we do not participate in the culture that shaped the texts, and so cannot identify these genres naturally and intuitively.

A PROCEDURE FOR CARRYING OUT GENRE ANALYSIS

To look for genres in prophetic or psalmic texts in the Hebrew Bible you need two things from the outset, your structure analysis (especially the outline), and a list of definitions of prophetic or psalm genres. The best available list of genre definitions for the prophetic literature is found in the "Introduction to Prophetic Literature" and "Glossary" in Marvin A. Sweeney, *Isaiah 1-39* (Forms of the Old Testament Literature; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996). An older, but still valuable list may be found in Eugene March, "The Basic Types of Prophetic Speech," in *Old Testament Form Criticism*, pp. 157-175 (edited by John H. Hayes; San Antonio: Trinity University, 1974). The best available list of genre definitions for the Psalms is: Erhard S. Gerstenberger, *Psalms: Part 1, with an Introduction to Cultic Poetry* (Forms of the Old Testament Literature, 14; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988) "The Genres of Cultic Poetry," pp. 9-21, and "Glossary," pp. 243-265.

There are three parts to each genre definition, the form, the intention, and the setting. The "form" refers to the structure (the organization of the passage) that is typical of passages that fit the genre. The "intention" is the specific purpose for which a passage belonging to a genre is used. The "setting" is the typical societal or institutional context within which the genre is used. For example, a lament psalm (also called a dirge) in the Hebrew Bible is characterized by a structure of five elements in the following sequence: Expressions of moaning and wailing; Description of catastrophe; Reference to former bliss or strength; Call to weep and wail; Subdued plea. The purpose of this genre is to express grief. The setting is a context of loss, specifically the loss of someone to death, the destruction of a city or the defeat of the nation in war. (See Gerstenberger's definition on pages 10-11.)

In Gerstenberger's list of definitions these three aspects of each genre are relatively easy to find. The form is always given as a list of basic elements, set off from the rest of the discussion. After each element of the form Gerstenberger gives chapter and verse references for examples of that element so you can see just what each thing is in practice. The rest of his discussion will describe the genre's intention and setting fairly quickly, and then describe some of the common variations in form that the genre shows.

Sweeney's discussion of definitions for the genres of Hebrew Bible prophetic literature is a little more difficult to use. His discussion is quite thorough and dependable, but you have to work a bit more to dig out the information. He gives form, intention and setting, but the elements of each form are not listed in the easy-to-read fashion – at least in the introduction. You need to read Sweeney's discussion, and make your own lists. The definitions in his "Glossary," while shorter than those in the "Introduction to Prophetic Literature," are also usually more schematic, and thus, form, intention and setting are easier to find clearly.

Begin by comparing the structure of your passage to the forms given for all the genres of the psalms if your passage is a psalm, or all the genres used by the prophets if your passage is from a prophetic book. It may be that it matches none of them. If so, you may conclude that your passage doesn't use a genre. This is possible. Alternatively, your passage may seem to contain elements of more than one genre. This is possible, but not common. In this case, you should try to identify the genre whose form your passage is most like. Finally, there are also passages that clearly match only one genre, and you can see that right away.

Once you have identified – on the basis of this comparison of structure and forms – a genre that you think is used in your passage, you should ask yourself a series of questions.

1. Do all the elements of the genre's form appear in this passage? If not, which one's are missing? (If you are not sure whether a part of your passage corresponds to an element of a genre's form, check the examples given with the definition.)
2. Are there parts of this passage that do not match any of the elements of the genre's form? If so, which ones?
3. What is the purpose (the intention) of the genre? Does that purpose seem to apply to this passage?
4. How do the differences between the structure of this passage and the form of the genre (your answers to questions 1 & 2) give this passage a purpose that is different from that of the genre?
5. In what sort of setting is the genre used? Would this passage fit in a similar setting?
6. Do the differences between the structure of this passage and the form of the genre suggest that this passage was used in a different setting from the one that the genre was used in?

Since the ancient audience would know how genres were supposed to go, and where they were supposed to be used, differences between your passage's structure and the genre's standard form are significant. These represent the way the prophet or psalmist customized, or individualized, the genre to the purposes and needs relating to the particular time of the passage's first delivery. Keep note of these. Note especially those times when the differences between a genre and a particular passage using it create a situation in which the passage builds up certain expectations in its audience, and then contradicts those expectations.

TRADITION ANALYSIS

WHAT'S GOING ON HERE

For millennia interpreters of the Hebrew Bible have observed that individual Biblical passages sometimes repeat particular themes or units of content (e.g., the story of the exodus from Egypt). These themes or content units vary in structure, and may occur in all kinds of passages, which themselves may have very different structures and purposes. For example, a code of laws, a psalm praising God for mighty deeds, a psalm pleading for help, and a prophetic speech accusing Israel of violating God's covenant, although they all are quite different in structure and purpose (i.e., genre), as part of the way they make their point may retell the story of God's bringing Israel out of Egypt. Moreover, these references to the story of the Exodus from Egypt often seems to assume that the passage's audience will know the story, and grant it some authority.

What becomes particularly important about this thematic kinship among passages of diverse types is that individual passages, while referring to the same story or theme, show variations on the basic pattern. These variations – differences – from the basic pattern often make key contributions to the meaning of the individual passage. For example, depending on the how much of the story the Biblical passage repeats and which aspects of it are emphasized, the story of the exodus from Egypt, might be told as a story of the defeat of Pharaoh, of the liberation of slaves, of the making of a nation, or of God's grace and Israel's lack of faith.

When we are interpreting Biblical texts *without reference* to the culture and historical situations within which they originate, these cases of references to common stories and themes point us to some illuminating comparisons. We are free to use these or not, as we choose.

When we are interpreting Biblical texts *in terms of* the culture and historical situations within which they originate, scholars recognize that these cases of references to common stories and themes are instances of the use of authoritative theological traditions in the Biblical literature. In other words, they are part of the culture of ancient Israel. Specifically, they are part of the theological "equipment" of ancient Israel. The first audiences of these passages would have known about these core stories and themes and would have expected them to be repeated in certain typical and accepted ways. Thus differences from the conventional way of repeating the tradition would have been particularly significant in communicating meaning. The rest of this discussion focuses on this way of interpreting these patterns of similarity and difference among texts.

An ancient audience would know theological traditions about God's dealings with Israel (e.g., the story of the crossing of the sea, the wilderness wanderings and the gift of the land to Israel) in the same way that you may know the Apostles' Creed or the Lord's Prayer or certain hymns that your church sings a lot. When you or your pastor recite a phrase from one of these familiar sources of theology, it brings the whole creed, prayer or hymn to mind for the congregation. In just the same way, when a Hebrew Bible author or speaker used a theological tradition, the audience had certain expectations about what would come next because the tradition was familiar stuff. For example, after hearing of the crossing of the sea and the wilderness guidance, the audience would expect to hear about the entry into the promised land.

There is one significant difference, however, between the examples of our creed and prayer and hymns, and theological traditions in the Hebrew Bible. In the Hebrew Bible theological traditions

have no set, precise form of words the way the creed, the Lord's Prayer and modern hymns do. Hebrew Bible traditions have a set content, and some key words or phrases that stay the same, but the exact words used to recite the whole tradition may vary from case to case.

In analyzing theological traditions in the Hebrew Bible your aim is to figure out what the normal form of the tradition is. What you're really looking for is knowledge of how the ancient audience would expect the tradition would go and what point(s) they would expect to be made with it. (For example, they would expect the wilderness wanderings to come after the crossing of the sea.) Since we don't have any ancient Israelites around to tell us these things any more, we have to reconstruct this ourselves. We do this by finding other occurrences of the tradition and comparing and contrasting all these occurrences with each other to see if there is a standard version (e.g., a standard story line). Once we know what the standard version of the tradition is, we can see whether a prophet or psalmist is using the tradition normally, or he or she is doing something people don't expect.

PROCEDURES FOR CARRYING OUT TRADITION ANALYSIS

The following steps take you through the analysis of the use of traditions in a passage from the prophets or psalms:

1. *The first step is to identify places in your passage where you think that the prophet or psalmist is using a theological tradition.* There may be one tradition, or more than one, or none in your passage. (If there are more than one, you must repeat these procedures for each tradition.) Identifying traditions in a passage is simply a matter of developing and testing hunches. A good question to ask in developing such a hunch is, "Have I heard this anywhere else in the Hebrew Bible." You can test that hunch by trying to make the list described in step 2. If you can't make such a list, or if you've made such a list, but can't create the standard version described in step 3, maybe your hunch was wrong. Remember that not all passages will use theological traditions.

Some examples of traditions are:

- the story of the crossing of the sea, guidance in the wilderness, conquest of the Canaanites/Amorites, entrance into the land -- found, for example, in Amos 2:9-11 and Ps 135:8-12 among other places
 - God's presence with Israel in the wilderness -- found, for example, in Amos 5:25 and Hos 2:14-15 among other places (Note that this is not the same as the previous tradition. This is the single item, whereas the previous one was a list of items, and thus is different even though it included this second item.)
 - the phrase "the LORD's anointed" (or a similar phrase like "his [i.e., the LORD's] anointed" -- found in Isaiah 45:1 and 1 Sam 24:6 among other places
 - the Ten Commandments -- found in whole, or in major part in Exodus 20:1-17, Deut 5:6-21, Hos 4:2 and Jer 7:9
 - the phrase "the alien, the orphan and the widow" -- found in a number of places, including Deut 14:29 and 26:12
2. *List the other occurrences of the tradition.* You find these other occurrences by using an exhaustive concordance for the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament. Look up some of the key words in the tradition as it occurs in your passage. You will find many places where these key words occur by

themselves. You will find other places where the key words are part of a reference to only a part of your tradition (e.g., to only the crossing of the sea, but not to the wilderness wanderings). These are not occurrences of the tradition you are researching. These key words are just a means for you to find other occurrences of this tradition. These occurrences must be like the tradition in the passage you are interpreting in their essential characteristics. Make a list of these occurrences of the tradition that you find. **WARNING: This is sometimes tedious and time-consuming work. It can be like panning for gold. You have to wash away a lot of mud, but the few nuggets of gold you find are worth it.**

3. *Develop a picture of the standard version of the tradition by **COMPARING AND CONTRASTING** the various occurrences.* This is a composite creation. This "standard version" is not a single text, but rather a composite of the common features and basic variations from all the passages you collected. You can assemble this list of common features and basic variations by asking questions like the following: What is the tradition's usual content? If there are several pieces to the tradition (e.g., it's a story with several incidents), is there a standard sequence to the pieces? Is there one kind of situation in which it is used more than others? Of whom is it said? In what circumstances is it said and for what purpose? Who says it? To whom is it said, to what effect, and with what meaning? What point(s) is/are made by using the tradition? In the end you want to have a list of the similarities in the content, expression and use of the tradition for the various occurrences you found in step 2. Don't boil this down too much. Find the similarities, but don't condense them into some kind of one-line summary. Keep the details in front of you.
4. *Compare the occurrence of the tradition in your passage with the standard version you established in step 3, and identify the ways it is like the standard version and the ways it is different.* Pay careful attention to both likenesses and differences.
5. *Use the tradition to help you outline the theological debate of which the passage is a part (usually only for prophetic speeches).* Prophets use traditions because they can count on their audience knowing these things. Once you've determined how the prophet's use of the tradition agrees with or differs from the standard, you can use those agreements and differences to get a picture of where the prophet and the audience agree and disagree theologically. Where the prophet's use of the tradition is consistent with the use and meaning of the tradition elsewhere, the prophet and audience probably agree. Where the prophet uses a tradition in ways that differ from the usual pattern, then the usual pattern probably represents the audience's view, and the difference probably represents the prophet's view.
 - You can also collect some of the theological views of a prophet and his or her audience by deducing what assumptions are necessary to draw the conclusions the prophet and audience get from the tradition. A couple of helpful questions you could ask are: What kind of assumptions would make the prophet's different use of the tradition logical even though it is not the typical way to use the tradition? What kind of assumptions would make the audience's view (based on the tradition) logical even though the prophet apparently disagrees with it?
 - This argumentative use of traditions is most characteristic of prophetic speeches. However, it is sometimes true of psalms as well so you should try the same kind of analysis here if you are exegeting a psalm. Just don't expect that you will find evidence of a debate as often.
6. *Evaluate the impact of the use of the tradition within your passage.* Pay particular attention to the deviations from normal use that you uncovered in step 4. What is the effect on the audience of these violations of what they expect about how this tradition will be used? Other questions

that may be helpful are: Given where the tradition comes in the structure of the passage, what role does it play in the text? What are the points that it makes with the audience?

ANALYSIS OF OPPORTUNITIES FOR AUDIENCE RESPONSE

WHAT'S GOING ON HERE

Any speech or text requires its audience or reader to do some work in determining the full meaning of that speech or text for that audience or reader. In order to understand what I mean you only need to think of a few examples. When you say something to another person and they understand you to have said something entirely different from what you thought you said (like the time I preached on Genesis 22 and the stewardship chairperson of that congregation called it a great "stewardship sermon" because in 20 minutes I made a single comment about thinking of mission priorities ahead of budget limits), you know that the meaning of that statement was made up of a combination of the words you said, and some ideas your listener added to those words. Another example is when you read two paragraphs, and the second contradicts what the first one says. In order to get a completed meaning from both of those paragraphs, you must resolve that contradiction. In doing that you are yourself contributing to the creation of the meaning. Another example is when a preacher asks the congregation a question in the middle of her or his sermon. The congregation answers in their minds, and thereby contributes to the meaning they receive from the sermon. Basically, any time there is a form of dissonance in the text, or between the text and the audience's expectations, or between the text and the life situation in which it is read or heard, the audience must work to resolve that dissonance so that the text will "make sense."

Your analytical task here has two steps: to identify those places where your passage could be asking the audience or readers to do work at completing the meaning of the passage; and to sort out the nature of the involvement asked of the audience. You do not yet have to figure out the meaning created by this interaction of text and audience. That comes in the next step when you think about the audience and its mentality. In this step your focus is on the text itself, and trying to identify the opportunities it gives its readers to do some work in completing the passage's meaning.

These opportunities take various forms:

- questions addressed to the audience (as at the end of Amos 2:11, or as in Isa 5:4);
- contradictory statements;
- cases where the text assumes knowledge on the part of the audience;
- cases where the text leaves out information the audience would want to know (this is actually more common in narratives than in psalms and prophetic speeches, a good example in a narrative text is Genesis 22 where God commands Abraham to sacrifice Isaac, but the story tells us nothing of what Abraham thought or said back to God)
- cases where the text builds up certain expectations and then doesn't keep to them (as where Isa 5:1-6 creates an expectation that the audience is being asked to judge someone else, an expectation that Isa 5:7 doesn't keep when it turns out to be the audience that is judged);

- cases where the passage appears to reply to something the audience has said even though their words are not reported (as where Hos 4:4 seems to respond to the fact that people have been bringing complaints about the drought alluded to in 4:3);
- gaps in the continuity of the text (as between Psa 22:19-21a where the psalmist asks for divine help and Psa 22:21a-24 where the Psalmist thanks God for *already having helped him/her*);
- cases where a tradition is used, but not in the usual form or way (as in Amos 2:9-11 where the giving of the prophets and Nazirites is [uniquely] added to the tradition of God's mighty acts for Israel);
- cases where a genre is used, but not in the usual form or way (as in Amos 2:6-16 where the recital of God's mighty acts for Israel [vv 9-11] is added in the middle of a fairly standard prophetic judgment speech consisting of an accusation [vv 6b-8+12] and announcement of judgment [vv 13-16]).

PROCEDURE

The procedure here is fairly simple: just two steps. The first step involves the identification of possible opportunities for audience involvement in the creation of the passage's meaning. The second step involves an assessment of each of those possible opportunities to see whether an audience response is required to complete the meaning of the passage, and an assessment of the sort of response required.

1. **Identify possible opportunities for audience involvement** by checking your passage to see if any of the items on the list given above occur in your passage. I will repeat the list here in the form of questions for you to ask about your passage. (For examples of each kind of opportunity for audience involvement see the list in the previous part of this section.) As you ask each of these questions, keep notes on all the places where each of these kinds of opportunities for audience involvement appear in your passage. Of course, not all of these will appear in every passage. Indeed, your passage may contain none at all. Here's the list of questions:

- Does your passage contain any questions addressed to the audience?
- Does your passage contain contradictory statements?
- Are there instances where the text assumes knowledge on the part of the audience?
- Are there instances where the text seems to leave out information that the audience would want to know?
- Does the text build up certain expectations and then not keep to them?
- Are there places where the passage appears to reply to something the audience has said even though their words are not reported?
- Are there gaps in the continuity of the text?
- Does the text use a tradition, but not in the usual form or way?
- Is a genre used in the text, but not in the usual form or way?

2. *Assess the possible opportunities to see if they require an audience response, and what sort of response that might be.* Not every occurrence of these textual phenomena that might call for a response from the audience actually needs a response from the audience in order to complete the meaning of the passage. For example, some gaps in the continuity of a text may be inherent in the structure of the genre to which the text belongs, and thus are an accepted part of the text. A case in point is the way an OT complaint psalm will shift immediately from a plea for help to a thanksgiving for God's help as if God had already given it (e.g., Psalm 22 mentioned above). That gap is simply an ordinary part of a complaint psalm because a response from God occurred between those two parts of the psalm. Thus no particular effort is required from the audience to close the gap so the psalm can have a consistent meaning.

In cases where you think the text requires some sort of response from the audience (e.g., when it asks the audience a question), you want to try to estimate what sort of response is required from the audience in order to complete the meaning of the passage. You will not be able to come to finished conclusions about this until the next section of analysis, but you can narrow the possibilities here. For example, does a question addressed to the audience require a "yes" or "no" answer, or some other kind of answer? If it requires a "yes" or "no" answer, does it seem to expect one answer or the other?

In the case of questions asked of the audience it is very likely that an audience response will be necessary. Be especially careful that you not dismiss what are called rhetorical questions. For these questions the questioner knows the answer that the audience will give, but that does not mean you can treat the question as though it were a statement. The question is asked precisely to get the audience to give that answer. The audience does not need to say the answer aloud. It is enough if they think it. Occasionally, questions addressed to the audience do not seem to need an answer (e.g., Isa 42:23 which seems simply a way to get attention), but in general questions addressed to the audience seem to require audience involvement to the extent of answering the question. (For example, the audience's answers to the questions in Isa 5:4 are extremely important because they are the way the prophet gets the audience to consent in the judgment he pronounces on them in 5:7.)

Of the possible opportunities for audience involvement in the completion of a passage's meaning, apart from questions asked of the audience, the following three are the most likely to produce instances where work is actually required on the part of the audience for the meaning of the passage to be clear:

- contradictory statements;
- cases where the text builds up certain expectations and then doesn't keep them;
- cases where the passage appears to reply to something the audience has said even though their words are not reported.

In the first two instances, you chiefly need to be careful that you have a real contradiction, and that the text really does create the expectations you think it does. In the third instance, it will be fairly clear if the passage is replying to something the audience has said, and your real task will be to try to figure out from the response in the passage what the audience was saying.

Several other of the possible opportunities for audience involvement will produce less frequently instances that actually require the audience to work to finish the meaning of the passage. These are:

- cases where the text assumes knowledge on the part of the audience;
- cases where the text leaves out information the audience would want to know
- gaps in the continuity of the text.

Here the issue is whether what you are seeing in the text arises a) because of our ignorance of things that speakers/writers and audiences/readers who were part of the ancient culture could take for granted, or b) because it really is something an ancient audience would have to think and make a decision about too.

Finally, several items from the list of possible occasions for audience involvement in completing the meaning of the passage will not often produce actual cases of this, but should be checked anyway. These are:

- cases where a tradition is used, but not in the usual form or way;
- cases where a genre is used, but not in the usual form or way.

In general the differences between the text and the typical pattern of the genre to which it belongs, or between the usual form of a tradition and the way the text repeats the tradition will contribute to the meaning in ways that are apparent in the words of the text. This you will have already taken account of in previous sections of the analysis. Sometimes, however, the differences create a dissonance that the audience must resolve for the passage to make sense or have meaning. Then they are something to take note of here as well. These times may not be all that frequent, but they are important so it is important to check for them.

SYNTHESIS

RECONSTRUCTING THE TEXT'S MEANING IN THE HISTORICAL OR LITURGICAL/EXISTENTIAL SITUATION IN WHICH IT ORIGINATES

In the history of their reading by church and synagogue, there have been many ways of finding meaning in the speeches of the prophets and the poems of the psalmists. Some of these have in no way regarded prophetic speeches and psalms as contextual. Others have regarded them as contextual, but have sought the context in places quite different from the history of ancient Israel (e.g., Christological interpretation of prophetic speeches, devotional reading of the psalms).

Nevertheless, readers of passages in the psalms and prophetic literature soon notice that these texts point to particular human situations to which they have some relationship. In varying degrees these passages refer to specific people and groups; they speak of things those people are doing and/or saying within the time frame of the speech or psalm. These hints of a world apart from the text itself - but to which the text refers, for which the text was composed, and within which it comes to life -- invite us to re-imagine that world as a part of finding the meaning the text has to offer us.

Just enough of this world that the texts invite us to re-imagine is visible for us to see that while it is full of human dilemmas and concerns that we recognize, it is also quite different from ours. If we want to take seriously the societal, cultural, economic, political and historical differences between our world and the world for which the texts first had a message, then we need to discipline our imaginations with information about that world.

If we conceive prophetic texts and psalms as addressing the real world situations in which they originated, then re-imagining those situations contributes to our understanding of those texts. If those situations are only partly described in the texts that address them -- as is often the case, then it will take some imagination to fill in the gaps. If those situations unfold in a culture, society and history that are different from ours, then we need to take some care to do our re-imagining in an informed way.

THE PROPHETS

In the introduction I said we would work from a perspective that sees the prophets to be engaged in interpreting or reinterpreting the meaning of events and/or conditions in their particular situation. Based on that assumption, in order for us to reconstruct the meaning of a prophetic speech in its historical context, we must establish the connection between the text and its historical situation. Then

we will be able to reconstruct its meaning in that context because we will be able to see what events and conditions the speech interprets, as well as the interpretations of reality to which it is opposed.

In pursuing this task we are helped by the fact that the prophet and his or her audience share the same historical situation. They are actors in the same scene, sharing the same story line of events. In his or her speeches the prophet offers the audience a theological point of view from which the prophet interprets the common situation. The audience, of course, has its own theological point of view from which it interprets the same situation. Based on that interpretation, they anticipate that the future will unfold in a certain way. The prophet, based on his or her interpretation of the situation, anticipates that the future will unfold in a different way. The prophet's speech expresses that point of view in an attempt to move the audience to change their point of view on the situation.

It may help you to think of this as a brief story. There are certain events and conditions that form the background and set the scene for the story. There are certain characters in the story, at least the prophet and the audience. There may not be much of a plot to the story, but at least the two characters have their (probably different) expectations about how the story will develop in the future. The two characters also have their particular points of view. On the basis of those points of view they engage in a sort of dialogue. We have the prophet's side of this in the speech. Everything else is only implied by that speech. We must reconstruct it. All the analysis you have done up this point has mostly served the purpose of helping you understand the prophet's speech thoroughly. Along the way, however, you will also have turned up some information about the audience and the situation that the prophet and audience are concerned about. In this section you will add to those bits and pieces of information, and will pull it together into a coherent picture.

There are four things in particular that you need to get a picture of:

1. who is the audience? what is their economic status? what is their social standing? what kind of power do they have, and how much? what resources do they control? where do they fit into the structure of society in their time? what are they doing? what are they saying?
2. what are the social, economic and political conditions in the situation the prophet and audience share, and what are the problems or major life questions -- if any -- before the community in that context?
3. what is the audience's (theological) interpretation of that situation, the point of view on which that is based (especially the theological point of view), and what kind of future they anticipate?
4. what is the prophet's (theological) interpretation of the situation, the point of view on which that is based (especially the theological point of view), what kind of future he or she anticipates and what kind of change -- if any -- does she or he seek from the audience?

You have at least four sources of information for this work:

- the passage itself, and your own detailed analysis of it (much of the analysis you have done, there is a bit more to go);
- reading in a history of Israel (or other resource) on the historical circumstances and events in Israel when the passage was preached by the prophet;
- reading in a commentary that might give you a more precise description of the circumstances when your passage was preached (you might also be unable to find this);
- information from your course work in Hebrew Bible.

I suggest the following five steps to reconstruct the meaning of a prophetic text in its historical situation:

1. Make an inventory of the cast of characters, scenes and events that are named and/or implied by your passage. List each of the characters mentioned in the passage. Take particular care to identify the audience. List everything that the passage says each character is doing and saying. List any titles or descriptions given them, especially anything applied to the audience. Make a note of persons and groups who are NOT mentioned in the speech, but whom you would expect to present in the situation. List any indications of what is happening at the time the prophet is speaking, or has happened before the prophet speaks.

For an example of what this involves let's look at Hosea 4:1-6. In this passage there are four characters of note (also some minor ones): Hosea (the speaker throughout), the LORD (the speaker [through Hosea] in vv 4-6), the audience=all Israel (see v 1), and the priest (v 4). A drought is taking place even as the prophet speaks, and probably has been going on for some time (v 3). The audience has been engaging in the actions described in v 2, and they have also been complaining to God about the drought (as implied by v 4). This is not a complete inventory of characters, events, conditions, etc. mentioned in the text, but perhaps it's enough for you to get the idea of what to look for.

Not every prophetic speech will be as rich in data about its situation as Hos 4:1-6, but you should look for as much of this as you can find because prophetic speeches address the particular conditions at the moment of their preaching. In most instances they are the best source of information for that particular set of conditions. If you want to test whether you have found all that can be dug out of the passage, you could check a commentary, but be aware that not every commentary will describe this kind of information, nor do they always do a thorough job.

2. Do background reading in a history (and perhaps a commentary) to fill in the broader historical context and the larger issues in Israelite society in that period. Be careful that you don't substitute the picture of the broader situation for the specific occasion to which your passage speaks. You can get the specific picture only by teasing it out of the passage itself. On some occasions, where a speech can be dated to a year in which major historical developments took place, your reading concerning the broader historical context will be essential to understanding the passage. (For example, the events of the year 609 BCE in relation to the kingdom of Judah are crucial to understanding the concerns of the audience for Jeremiah's speech in Jer 7:3-15.) For the most part, however, the role of this picture of the broader situation is to help you make sense of the details of the passage's specific situation, but it shouldn't overwhelm them.
3. Now take the data you have assembled in the first two steps and answer the questions about who the audience is, etc., and what the conditions and life questions of the speech's situation are.
4. Now you are ready to try to spell out the interpretations the audience and the prophet give to the situation – how they see that God is, and will be, active in the situation, and therefore what they must do to find life in these conditions. Start with the audience's (theological) interpretation of the situation, the (theological) point of view on which that is based, and the kind of future they anticipate. You will have developed some data for this in your various analytical steps. Still, you will probably not have a full picture, and will have to use your imagination to complete it.
 - Look for the times (if any) in your passage when the prophet describes what the other side says. You collected this information in step 1. above. Be careful, however, to remember that you are getting this from the prophet's point of view. He or she has evaluated the validity of what the audience is saying. You need to figure out what the audience themselves would mean. For example, in his Temple sermon in chapter 7 Jeremiah

says that the audience is trusting in deceptive words when they say "This is the temple of the LORD" (Jer 7:4). The audience, obviously, doesn't think these are deceptive words. What meaning would they attach to this sentence?

- Your previous analysis of the passage is full of possibilities for helping you fill in the view of the audience. The analysis of the use of traditions in your passage can be a great help here. That analysis should have resulted in indications of areas where the prophet's and audience's point of view coincided, and points where those two points of view differed. Those results feed directly into this stage of your work. Likewise, your analysis of the opportunities for the audience to become involved in completing the meaning of the passage, to the extent that it helps expose assumptions the audience would have been making, can help you fill in their point of view. Sometimes the results of your genre analysis can play a role here too, but I would expect them to be less helpful at this point than others.
 - You also will be helped if you can connect the theological ideas the audience seems to hold with broader theological streams and schools of thought that existed in Israel when your prophet was active. This will allow you to fill in some of the blanks in the audience's point of view that the passage gives you no information for. You cannot just substitute these generalities for what you find in the text, however. The trick is to connect the generalities to the specifics you find in the text, and thus complete the audience's point of view.
 - In reconstructing the audience's point of view, grant as much sincerity and faithfulness to the opposing side as you do to the prophet. These people weren't jerks, but were serious people of faith with substantial theological arguments (if they weren't the prophet wouldn't have had to work so hard to change their minds) so don't trivialize them or try to make them into cardboard "bad guys." Take them seriously.
5. Now go on to develop the prophet's (theological) interpretation of the situation, the (theological) point of view on which that is based, the kind of future he or she anticipates and the change(s) – if any – does she or he seek from the audience. On the one hand, this is easy because this is the area for which you have the most information – prophet's speech. On the other hand, this is hard because you will be tempted to think that the words the prophet said are the sum total of the prophet's point of view and message. That is not so. Remember the speech is what the prophet says to persuade the audience to change their point of view, their interpretation of reality. That will not necessarily be the same as just saying what the prophet thinks.

The first thing you need to do here is go back through the results of your analysis of the passage's structure, and of any genres and traditions used in the passage. You want to take those various pieces and put them into a coordinated picture of how the speech works together. Then you want to pick up your analysis of the places where the audience must contribute something to complete the meaning of the speech. Now that you have a fuller picture of the audience, go back and put yourself in that situation and point of view, fill in the places in the text where they must contribute something to the meaning, and finalize your holistic picture of how the text works together and what meaning it communicates to the audience about the situation it finds itself in.

From that picture of the meaning the audience receives from the speech about their situation, you should be able to infer the prophet's interpretation of that reality, and the prophet's point of view on God and the world that is the basis for that interpretation. As you did with the audience, you will probably need to relate the specifics of the prophet's ideas in and behind this speech with the

broader theological streams and schools of thought in the OT and ancient Israel as you learned about these in class.

THE PSALMS

With a psalm you can follow much the same procedure as just described for a prophetic speech. There will be changes, however, brought on by the fact that a psalm is more easily located in a life (existential) or liturgical situation than in a specific historical situation. Furthermore, psalms often reaffirm or reassert a particular interpretation of reality rather than challenge it, so a dialogue between psalmist and audience may not exist because they hold the same point of view (in which case the psalmist will tend to speak *for* the audience more than *to* the audience). These differences between psalms and prophetic speeches would lead to a process something like this:

The task is as follows, depending on whether the psalm affirms or challenges an existing and accepted interpretation of reality:

If the psalm is *affirming an existing and accepted interpretation of reality* rather than challenging it, the task is *threefold*.

- identify the audience, who they are, their social and economic status, etc., what they are doing and saying (the same as with a prophetic text)
- to identify the situation of the psalmist and/or audience, including unfolding its social, economic, political and personal dimensions, and any problems or major life questions before the individual or community in that context;
- to describe the theological interpretation the psalm gives to that situation, and the (theological) point of view on which that is based;

If the psalm is *challenging an existing and accepted interpretation of reality* for which it wishes to pose an alternative interpretation, then the task is *fourfold* as in the case of a prophetic speech.

- identify the audience, who they are, their social and economic status, etc., what they are doing and saying (the same as with a prophetic text)
- to identify the social, economic and political conditions in the situation the prophet and audience share, and any problems or major life questions before the community in that context;
- to describe the audience's (theological) interpretation of that situation, the (theological) point of view on which that is based, and what kind of future they anticipate;
- to describe the psalm's (theological) interpretation of the situation, the (theological) point of view on which that is based, and what kind of future he or she anticipates.

You have *four sources of information* for this work. Two are of primary importance, and two are of secondary importance.

Two are of primary importance because they will always give you information relevant to your task.

- the passage itself, and your own detailed analysis of it
- knowledge of the theological streams and points of views represented in the Hebrew Bible and ancient Israel.

Two are of secondary importance because they will not always be precise enough to be useful or relevant. Don't ignore them, but don't expect too much from them, and don't use them if what they give you is too vague.

- reading in a history of Israel (or other resource) on the historical circumstances and events in Israel when the psalm was composed (here you will often have to think of a broad period [e.g., the Divided Monarchy, post-exilic times], rather than a specific occasion);
- reading in a commentary that might give you a more precise description of the circumstances when your passage was sung (you might also be unable to find this).

I suggest the following steps to reconstruct the meaning of the psalm in its liturgical or existential situation:

1. *Make an inventory of the cast of characters, scene and events that are named and/or implied by your passage.* List each of the characters mentioned in the passage. Take particular care to identify the audience, and the psalmist. List everything that the passage says each character is doing and saying. List any titles or descriptions given them, especially anything applied to the audience and/or the psalmist. Make a note of persons and groups who are NOT mentioned in the speech, but whom you would expect to present in the situation. List any indications of what is happening at the time the psalmist is speaking, or has happened before the psalmist speaks. One thing will be different here from a prophetic text. In a prophetic text there is a clear human speaker (the prophet) and a clear human audience. This can be more complicated with a psalm. Often the psalmist speaks for the human congregation that also hears the psalm. Thus there really isn't a human audience. The people, who in a prophetic speech would be the audience, are really the speaker of the psalm, and God is the audience. As a result, you can't really analyze the audience separately from the psalmist as a direct application of the instructions for a prophetic speech would suggest. Instead you have to treat the psalmist and audience as the same.
2. You may also do the sort of background reading that I suggested for a prophetic text (step 2 above). It will probably be much harder to do, and generally less fruitful, however. This is because -- apart from some notable exceptions (e.g., Pss 78 and 137) -- psalms are not so much oriented to particular historical events and situations, but towards existential and liturgical situations common in many historical periods.
3. *Now take the data you have assembled in the first two steps and answer the questions about who the audience is, etc., and what the conditions and life questions of the speech's situation are.*
4. If the psalm is *affirming an existing and accepted interpretation of reality* rather than challenging it, then only one task remains. In the previous step (3.) you developed a picture of the situation that the psalm is interpreting from a theological point of view. Now you are ready to articulate the theological interpretation the psalm gives that reality, and what the intellectual (especially theological) basis for that is. Your sources for this are principally two:
 - *Your previous analysis of the passage is full of possibilities for helping you fill in the psalm's interpretation of its situational reality.* The analysis of the use of traditions in your passage can be a great help here. The logic and assumptions built into the text's structure can contribute to your assessment of the psalm's point of view and interpretation of reality. Sometimes the results of your genre analysis can play a role here too, but I would expect them to be less helpful at this point than others.

- *You also will be helped if you can connect the theological ideas and perspective found in your psalm with broader theological streams and schools of thought that existed in Israel in the general era when your psalm was written (i.e., pre-exilic, exilic, post-exilic).* This will allow you to fill in some of the blanks in the psalm's point of view that the text gives you no information for. You cannot just substitute these generalities for what you find in the text, however. The trick is to connect the generalities to the specifics you find in the text, and thus complete the psalm's point of view.
5. If the psalm is *challenging an existing and accepted interpretation of reality* for which it wishes to pose an alternative interpretation, then you are in a situation much like that for a prophetic speech, and the steps for listening to the psalm in its own life situation are the same as for doing this with a prophetic speech (steps 4. and 5. above under "The Prophets").

RECONSTRUCTING THE MEANING OF A PROPHETIC TEXT IN THE HISTORICAL SITUATION OF THE BOOK TO WHICH IT BELONGS

WHAT'S GOING ON HERE

The prophetic books of the Bible indeed invite readers to consider individual passages within these books as separate speeches, composed with reference to some specific original historical situation. These passages are also part of *books*, however. These books were assembled after the times and situations for which the speeches were originally composed. That the individual prophetic speeches were included in the Biblical books indicates that -- in addition to the meaning they communicated in the times and situations for which they were originally composed -- they communicated new meaning in the new times and situations when the books were assembled. Thus we can find additional meaning in these passages if we interpret them as parts of the books to which they belong and with reference to the historical situation at the time of the book's composition.

An example of what I mean can be taken from the book of Jeremiah. The speeches of Jeremiah, when read for their meaning in the situation in which they were first heard, must be interpreted as addressed to the urban power elite of Jerusalem in the last three decades of (more or less) independent life of the kingdom of Judah (between 615 and 586 BCE). When read for their meaning in the situation in which the book of Jeremiah was composed, the passages are interpreted in the light of the radically different circumstances of the Babylonian exile (mid- to late 6th century BCE) or the difficult period of rebuilding after the exile (late 6th or early 5th century BCE).

We can see the kind of shift in meaning this involves if we consider the meaning of the laments in the book of Jeremiah. Among the speeches of Jeremiah there are a number of laments over Jerusalem, Judah and/or their people. Typically God voices these laments. In the context of their original delivery (when Jerusalem and Judah still exist) to speak a lament over the city/state/people as though they were dead, was an ominous threat, warning of the consequences of failing to change. In the context of the exile or rebuilding after the exile, the very same words are the voice of God weeping over the destruction of the people -- a much more sympathetic portrait of God sharing the people's grief at what had been lost.

So in this section we want to consider the different steps needed to interpret a prophetic speech in the historical situation of the composition of the book to which the speech belongs. This process for synthesizing the result of our textual analysis represents an alternative to the one we have just gone through, which interprets the meaning of a prophetic speech in light of the situation for which it was first spoken.

In principle one can also interpret psalms in this same way, that is, reconstruct the meaning a psalm would have held in the situation at the time the book of Psalms was assembled. In practice this is difficult to do with the book of psalms for two reasons. First, psalms are rarely composed with reference to chronologically specific situations. They are much more commonly composed with reference typical classes of life situations or typical liturgical situations. These occur again and again over long periods of time without great change within the structure of Israel's life. Thus there often is little difference between the meaning that a psalm had at the time of its composition and at the time, perhaps much later, when it was gathered up into the book of Psalms. Second, because the psalms tend to refer to generic situations that occur repeated, it is often difficult to pin most psalms down to specific times of composition, and it is similarly hard to date the stages of composition of the book of

Psalms. So in this manual we will describe this mode of synthesizing the results of our exegetical analysis only for prophetic speeches.

PROCEDURE

Before suggesting some steps for what you might do here, I want to be sure that you have in mind the relations between audience and text, on the one hand, and between text and literary context, on the other hand, that are assumed in what you will do here. A comparison with the analogous relations that were assumed in the previous section might help to make that clear. These are set forth in the following table.

	Reconstructing Meaning in the Situation in/for Which the Speech Was Composed	Reconstructing the Meaning in the Situation in/for Which the Book Containing the Speech Was Assembled
Who Is The Audience?	The people for whom the speech was composed, and who hear (or could have heard) it preached.	A later community (perhaps many generations later) who read the speech because they find a meaning in it.
Can We Expect to Find References to This Audience in the Text?	Yes	No
Does the Text Have a Literary Context?	No	Yes, the rest of the book of which it is a part.
How Does It Relate to Other Speeches of the Prophet in the Book	It does not necessarily have a direct relation to any other speech of the prophet, including the speeches next to it in the book. It does relate to all the other speeches of the prophet in a general way as the work of one person in which certain themes and continuities might be discerned.	It relates most particularly to the speeches next to it, simply by virtue of their proximity in the book, whether those speeches were composed by the same prophet or not. It relates to other speeches in the book according to the structure of the book as a whole and according to specific structural clues that establish links with other passages.
Who is the Community Through Whose Eyes and Ears You Are Trying to Hear the Speech's Meaning	The people who heard the prophet deliver this speech.	People in a specific later period, who read the speech as part of book in which they found meaning.

A glance at this table quickly shows some consequences for our work in synthesizing the meaning of a prophetic speech in the time when the book containing the passage is assembled.

- First, unlike our practice in the previous section, we cannot use the passage itself to tell us about the readers or their situation. Instead we will have to rely on secondary sources. This contrasts with our experience in the previous section where the passage itself could be our best source for information about the audience and its situation.
- Second, the passage now has a literary context that to some extent may frame the way readers find meaning in the passage. So you should take a moment to read at least the preceding passage or so, and then reflect on ways that this might influence the way a reader would react to the passage you are interpreting. This contrasts with our practice up till now where we have not looked at the speeches before and after our passage, for the simple reason that there is no guarantee that they were preached together.
- Third, the ancient reader of a passage in a prophetic book was in a somewhat similar position to the ancient reader of a Biblical story. That is they were reading something that spoke of events in which they did not participate directly, but which they nevertheless felt spoke in some way to their situation. So, as you will see soon, we can do our work of synthesizing meaning here by following steps similar to those in the synthesis section in the chapter on analyzing Biblical narratives.

So here are the steps to follow for reconstructing the meaning of a passage in a prophetic book for the audience and situation of the time of the assembling of the book containing the passage.

1. Reconstruct the identity and characteristics of the audience at the time of the book's assembling. Here are some questions to guide you in this:
 - who is the audience? what is their economic status? what is their social standing? what kind of power do they have, and how much? what resources do they control? where do they fit into the structure of society in their time? what are they doing? what are they saying?
 - what are the social, economic and political conditions in the situation faced by the community in that context?
 - what is the recent history of the community? have any of the various characteristics and circumstances you've described changed in that period? if so, which ones, and what would be the effects of such change
 - what theological perspectives are current in the community? what concerns would they have about their lives and their situation? what theological questions or problems would be on their minds?
2. After you have gathered the answers to these questions, and any others that seem good to you, try to imagine yourself into the situation of this community that is reading the prophetic book and the passage you are interpreting.
3. After filling in that picture, try to read the passage as a reader in that culture and context. Describe in your own words what the passage probably was about for these ancient readers. In other words, to what aspects of their life did the passage speak? How did it make sense of, or give meaning to, or assign importance and value to those aspects of their life? Now go back and

look at the aspects of your "retelling" of the passage's meaning for these ancient readers that are not explicitly stated in the Biblical text. Ask yourself where the "stuff" came from that "you filled in."

4. Still working in the frame of reference of the ancient readers of this passage, ask yourself what this passage tells you about who God is, how God acts, and how God deals with people? Test this against the theological points of view that were around in Israel at the time of the book containing the passage was assembled. Would the passage have caused its readers to rethink the way they understood their experience of God?
5. Still working in the frame of reference of the ancient readers of this passage, ask yourself what this passage tells you about what it means to be a human being? Who would the ancient readers have seen themselves to be in the light of this passage? If they were to look at their life through the "lens" of this passage, what would they see?

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